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*Robert Legvold, "The Gulf Crisis"*



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## The Gulf Crisis and the Future of Gorbachev's Foreign Policy Revolution

By Robert Legvold

Few doubted history had tacked a new direction when with one voice the Americans and Soviets instantly and angrily condemned Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, and called for a world-wide arms embargo of his country. But even the most credulous individual would have had trouble imagining the partnership to follow, and the hopes of a new world that would spring from it. Vast changes, of course, had already occurred in Soviet foreign policy by the time Hussein moved against Kuwait, changes fundamentally altering the nature of the superpower relationship, changes that at their most stunning undid the Coldwar European order. But the Gulf crisis carried the revolution in Soviet foreign policy across another threshold — and, along the way, altered the Bush Administration's view of the Soviet Union more than almost anything that had come before.

Even without knowing how the drama will end, therefore, the Gulf crisis is already a moment of historic proportion. In an incredible and tumultuous age, it ranks with the most powerful and creative of events. More than a fascinating and revealing case study, its effects already represent a seminal lurch of history.

### The First Ninety Days

On August 1, while Saddam Hussein's troops massed for the invasion, the American secretary of state happened to be in Irkutsk meeting with the Soviet foreign minister. Baker,

alerted by U.S. intelligence of troubling signs that the Iraqis were poised for attack, warned Shevardnadze, and urged him to do something to prevent it, to do something to "restrain these guys."<sup>1</sup> Curiously Shevardnadze knew much less than his U.S. counterpart. (Either Soviet intelligence missed the signs, or failed to inform Shevardnadze, or, most likely, had been deceived by Hussein.) He told the Secretary of State — more than once, because by the next day a worried Baker had learned from Washington that the invasion was only hours away — not to worry. Saddam had assured his Soviet friends that Iraq had no intention of attacking, and Shevardnadze was confident the confrontation between Iraq and Kuwait had gone as far as it would, in fact, that it was "being defused."<sup>2</sup> A day later, with the invasion well-advanced and the UN Security Council in emergency session, Shevardnadze confessed his misjudgment.<sup>3</sup> Baker had been right, he said, but "I virtually ruled out any further aggravation. . . I did not expect the Iraqis to commit such naked aggression against a defenseless and peace-loving country which did not pose a threat to anyone."

Secretary Baker and his entourage were the first to know how differently this time the Soviet Union would deal with a major regional crisis. In their private meetings, Shevardnadze had been visibly agitated by confirming news of the invasion. He made no effort to offer excuses for the Iraqis, notwithstanding a long Soviet-Iraq friendship, or to buy time while he and his colleagues sorted out where the balance of Soviet interests lay. He instead condemned the act, and offered to work to-

1 From Margaret Garrard Warner, "The Moscow Connection: The Inside Story of Secret Diplomacy between the Superpowers," *Newsweek*, 17 September 1990, p.24.

2 *Ibid.*

3 He spoke at a press conference at Vnukovo-2 Airport in Moscow, after Baker and he had completed work on the joint statement. See "Together Against Aggression," *Vestnik*, September 1990, p. 15.





gether in thwarting Iraq's aggression. Before the day of the attack was out, Moscow and Washington led the way in securing a UN Security Council resolution censuring Baghdad and demanding its withdrawal from Kuwait. Twenty-four hours later, the two issued their joint statement, announcing to the world the full alignment of their positions. (When Arabists in the Soviet foreign ministry had supposedly resisted a tough declaration, including the call for a general arms embargo, Shevardnadze had quickly overridden them.<sup>4</sup>)

From the start, however, there were important differences in accent between the two leaderships. The Soviet Union fully supported the U.S. Administration's uncompromising opposition to the conquest of Kuwait, including the fast-formed plans to impose comprehensive economic sanctions. But it also stressed the need to act under the auspices of the United Nations. Keeping the enterprise under UN aegis merged with another Soviet priority, namely, to avoid at nearly all costs war with Iraq, particularly one triggered by unilateral U.S. military actions.

When the Americans early the next week decided to send U.S. forces to Saudi Arabia as a deterrent to an Iraqi attack, and, rather than catch the Soviets unaware, first to inform them, Shevardnadze was distinctly unhappy over the news. Even Baker's invitation to join the United States with forces of his country's own — remarkable considering the tenacity with which American leaders through the years had fought to keep the Soviet military out of the region — did not do much to ease his concern. In the end, he grudgingly acceded, but, consistent with the Soviet stress on working through the United Nations, he first pushed the Americans to take seriously the Military Staff Committee of the Security Council, a neglected relic of the UN's founding when people dreamed the five permanent members would want to coordinate military actions designed to keep the peace. By the end of the crisis' second week, with U.S. forces flowing into the area, the Bush Administration seemed ready to turn economic sanctions into a formal blockade, enforced by U.S. naval power, with or without Security Council approval. Again, the Soviets demurred, this time with widespread sympathy among the other Security Council members, and, again, they insisted on the importance of mobilizing the UN and its machinery.

When over the weekend of August 18-19, the Americans decided to bend, rather than charge off without Security Council blessing, and a modestly chastened Baker telephoned Shevardnadze to confess that perhaps the United States "should have consulted more" and that his government did want Soviet help in enforcing the embargo, did want to act within the authorization of a Security Council resolution, the Soviet foreign minister repeated the Soviet determination to

see the Military Staff Committee reinvigorated.<sup>5</sup> Washington, eager to secure passage of the U.S.-British resolution permitting forceful implementation of the sanctions, this time, as another country's diplomat put it, "threw the Soviets the bone they wanted."

The to and fro leading to a favorable vote on Resolution 665, the sanction for a formal blockade, revealed another contrast in the two countries' concerns. Moscow had never, even at the outset of the crisis, severed ties with Baghdad. Arms deliveries promptly stopped, but diplomatic contacts continued. Indeed, between August 2 and the third week in August, Moscow had become the cockpit of diplomacy among the Arab states and with Iraq. Prince Bandar Bin Sultan al-Saud, the special emissary of the Saudi royal family came to Moscow; so did Saddun Hammadi, Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister; and the Kuwaiti and Egyptian foreign ministers were on their way. The Soviet leadership may have rejected as firmly as the United States Iraqi aggression, but from the start they left the door open to diplomatic persuasion. Before they would vote for Resolution 665, they wanted to give Hussein one last chance. So, Gorbachev sent him a message: To comply with UN resolutions and withdraw from Kuwaiti territory, restore the government, and assure the safety of foreigners, or, failing that, the Security Council would be "compelled to adopt appropriate additional measures."<sup>6</sup> August 24, Alexander Belonogov, the Deputy Foreign Minister, summoned U.S. Ambassador Jack Matlock, and reported that "We've heard from the Iraqis and the answer is unsatisfactory."<sup>7</sup> At four in the morning the next day, the Soviets joined twelve other members of the Security Council in voting to call on states with naval forces in the area to act "as may be necessary" to "ensure strict implementation" of the embargo. The resolution did not provide for a UN flag or command, something Soviet representatives had wanted but on which they did not insist.

Thus, by August 25, three weeks into the crisis, all the elements in the Soviet approach, an approach utterly transformed, were in place. First, and at the most essential level, the Soviet Union had not merely condemned the deed of a Third-World ally, but sought with others to inflict on it a clear and full defeat. Second, Soviet leaders had made the United Nations, particularly the Security Council and its five permanent members, the focus of their cooperation. Denying success to Hussein, thus, was only one objective; ensuring that his defeat was accomplished through potent international institutions was the other. Third, they had sought to protect a diplomatic route out of the impasse, rather than entrust the entire enterprise to coercive means.

There were also lesser features of the policy. One was a determination to keep Soviet military involvement to a mini-

4 Warner, "The Moscow Connection," p. 25

5 Elaine Sciolino and Eric Pace, "How the US Got UN Backing for Use of Force in the Gulf," *New York Times*, 30 August 1990.

6 See the account by Bill Keller in the *New York Times*, 25 August 1990.

7 Sciolino and Pace, "How the US Got UN Backing."



mum (again, in sharp contrast with desiderata in the Brezhnev years). A second was to save the 8000 Soviet nationals in Iraq from the fate of other nation's citizens, whom the Iraqi leadership had turned into de facto hostages. A third was to nurture a consensus with China, and where possible to gain credit with a range of skeptical governments, such as the Japanese, Saudi, and South Korean. A fourth was to do the least damage possible to the long-term standing of the Soviet Union with the largest range of Arab regimes. Finally, by early September a fifth element emerged: Returning from Harbin, Tokyo, and Pyongyang, Shevardnadze gingerly probed the possibility of linking the crisis to the solution of the other two major conflicts in the region, within Lebanon and between Israel and its neighbors.

Three weeks into the crisis, the profound effect of the Soviet Union's metamorphosis on American attitudes was also apparent. From the beginning the Administration had taken the Soviet leadership into its confidence, and treated it like a partner in a common enterprise. Secretary of State Baker, who served as the direct channel of contact, spoke daily by telephone with Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. Word of American initiatives was conveyed in advance, assessments of developments in the region, shared, and strategy, talked over. When President Bush was asked early in the crisis how supportive the Soviets were being, he answered that he could not "ask for a more favorable response" than Baker had received.<sup>8</sup>

Even when an issue arose over 193 Soviet military advisors still on the job in Iraq, the Administration went out of its way to minimize controversy, and the President continued to report "superb cooperation from the Soviets."<sup>9</sup> (In turn, when some of the Moscow policymaking community expressed doubts over ultimate U.S. intentions, including the suspicion that Washington meant to establish a permanent military presence in the region, Gorbachev cut short this line of commentary by noting in an August 31 press conference that the United States military was there at the invitation of the Saudis and in conformance with the UN Charter.)<sup>10</sup>

In early September the Administration hastily organized a summit with Gorbachev, an act that itself underscored the change taking place. The two leaders had only two months earlier met at the summit, and, while the Americans insisted this encounter was simply a natural follow on, in fact, for a U.S. president to seek an urgent meeting with the Soviet leader in order to coordinate policy in a crisis spoke volumes of just how differently the President now thought of his counterpart from their first meeting on Governors Island in fall 1988 or even from their first summit on Malta in December 1989. And

he showed it. Slowly, over the Administration's first two years, the President had edged toward a more favorable view of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, and, in the process, had eased his originally openly negative view of Western economic assistance to the Soviet Union. At the Malta summit he sketched a series of supportive economic measures the Administration would seek from the Congress, provided the Soviet Union satisfied a number of conditions. His representatives in other settings had often talked of making aid contingent on its use to privatize the Soviet economy and promote democracy. Now, after their interchange at Helsinki and the events of August, Bush had come full circle. Asked at the summit press conference whether he felt more sympathetic to suggestions for Western aid to the Soviet Union, he confessed that "this remarkable cooperation . . . gets me inclined to recommend as close cooperation in the economic field as possible," and he promised to say so to the Congress on his return.<sup>11</sup> A few days later Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher led a group of corporate executives to Moscow to discuss, among other things, ways of revitalizing the Soviet Union's declining oil industry.

Another episode at the summit was even more revealing. At one point during the press conference Gorbachev playfully let the correspondents in on a "secret." In their talks, he said, the President had confessed that "there was a long time when our view was that the Soviet Union had nothing to do in the Middle East, . . . had no business being there," but that no longer seemed important.<sup>12</sup> The next day the *New York Times* filled in the rest of the story. Bush in fact had invited the Soviet Union to play a greater diplomatic role in the region, and had even raised the possibility of working together on problems like the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>13</sup>

In the second and third months of the crisis, Soviet policy continued to evolve, but within the pattern set at the beginning. Some observers were surprised when in late September the Soviet Union aggressively took the lead in pushing for an air embargo of Iraq and, for emphasis, urged the unusual step of a Security Council meeting of foreign ministers to pass the measure. Shevardnadze, on the occasion, delivered the strongest Soviet speech to date and one of the strongest given by any leader. Iraq, he said, had committed "unprovoked aggression," resorted to "unprecedented blackmail," and, more importantly, "dealt a blow to all that mankind has recently achieved" in creating a new international order.<sup>14</sup> If it continued, he warned, "war may break out . . . any day, any moment." "We should remind those who regard aggression as an acceptable form of behavior that the United Nations has the power to

<sup>8</sup> See his press conference in the *New York Times*, 9 August 1990.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, 23 August 1990.

<sup>10</sup> *Pravda*, 2 September 1990.

<sup>11</sup> The text of the press conference is in the *New York Times*, 10 September 1990.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> See Andrew Rosenthal's report, "Bush, Reversing US Policy, Won't Oppose a Soviet Role in Middle East Peace Talks," *New York Times*, 11 September 1990.

<sup>14</sup> His speech to the General Assembly can be found in *Izvestiya*, 26 September 1990.



suppress acts of aggression," and that "there is ample evidence that this right can be exercised," and "will be, if the illegal occupation of Kuwait continues."

Observers were surprised, because until then, and most conspicuously at the Helsinki summit, the Soviets had gone out their way to avoid threats and to stress what a disaster anything other than a political solution would be. Gorbachev, in his meeting with Bush, had constantly dodged the issue of a Soviet military contribution to forces in the Gulf, putting great emphasis on avoiding the use of force. So clear was this theme that many saw a gulf growing between the two countries: The United States bearing the burden of the sword; the Soviet Union, the olive branch. Indeed, in one of the larger unremarked ironies of the unfolding crisis, a great many American commentators had begun to resent the Soviet Union for not being willing to play a larger military role.

Shevardnadze's strong words, however, were not inconsistent with this earlier reluctance. On the contrary, if anything, they reflected a sudden, deep alarm that the momentum toward war had gathered speed, and that, unless Hussein could be turned around, events were marching toward the abyss. Predictably what followed, therefore, was not a firming up of the Soviet military commitment or new initiatives designed to squeeze the Iraqis harder, but a diplomatic offensive.

In early September, before the Helsinki summit, on the way back from China, Japan, and North Korea, Shevardnadze volunteered that he was "ready if necessary" to go to Iraq in pursuit of peace.<sup>15</sup> At the time, the offer startled outsiders, and set a number of people to wondering if the Soviet Union might have an idea of trying to mediate the conflict. Had the U.S. administration suspected that the Soviets hoped to turn themselves into an honest broker, the partnership would have fast disintegrated. That was not the case, but even diplomatic probing by a Soviet Union, however loyal it remained to the united front, stirred less than enthusiastic U.S. support. Bush at Helsinki treated the idea as something to be indulged rather than applauded.

But, when Shevardnadze took the lead in the Security Council in late September, the Soviet leadership was galvanized by a growing dread, and no longer merely exploring alleys that might lead somewhere. Within days, it dispatched one of its own (one with special knowledge of the Arab world) on a serious mission to the region. Evgeny Primakov, before advancing up the political ladder and into the ultimate leadership circle, had been the Soviet Union's most prominent academic specialist on the Middle East. He traveled to Baghdad with the growing weight of Soviet apprehension on his shoulders. He also went with an obvious determination to give direct diplomacy a vigorous go.

For the better part of October, he engaged in a shuttle diplomacy reminiscent of Henry Kissinger's mid-1970s Middle East efforts. From Iraq, after long conversations with Hussein, he headed for Washington, and then back to Cairo, Riyadh, and Baghdad. The reports of his progress hardly quickened hopes, but the effort itself was telling. First, it was evident that the Soviet Union had now decided to take matters into its own hands. No longer would it operate in the shadows of U.S. policy, dutifully marching in step, shunning any risk of getting too far out in front. When Baker and then Bush received Primakov the third week in October, it was as someone in the thick of things, someone who might even represent a crucial alternative way out. And, when Gorbachev sat down with Mitterrand in Paris the next week, he was leading a fully independent policy, albeit one still firmly part of the common front against the Iraqi aggression.

Second, it was also evident that Primakov was not shuttling among capitals as a passive rapporteur. He had come to twist arms, particularly the Iraqis' — to try out ideas, to test where there might be give, where common ground might be developed. In Washington, after his meeting with Bush, the word was that he had come "with no plans whatsoever."<sup>16</sup> It was a technically accurate description, but scarcely one that captured the flavor of the variety of angles he had pressed on Hussein a week before. The Americans were determined that no compromise would be struck "rewarding" Hussein in any way for his aggression, but by the latter half of October the air was thick with devices by which Hussein might save face and find it worthwhile to lift his boot off Kuwait. Primakov had tried them all.

Third, the more prominence the Primakov mission took on within Soviet policy, the more plain it became that the Soviet leadership — as many others — sensed war looming nearer. But on the Soviet side the apprehension seemed to rest on the growing perception that neither the American nor the Iraqi leadership really understood the other party, that a fatalistic acceptance of war was taking hold in the United States, and, worst of all, that the Americans appeared not to appreciate how disastrous a war might prove to be. If the political and economic situation at home were not so crushingly grave, Soviet diplomacy might have been energized even more than it was.

## Back to Basics

Wondrous policy changes do not materialize out of thin air, and this one had an extraordinary genesis. A revolution in the whole of Soviet foreign policy prepared the way. Without this larger, prior transformation, almost certainly the Soviet Union would have reacted differently in the Gulf crisis. And,

<sup>15</sup>See David Remnick's report in the *Washington Post*, September 8, 1990.

<sup>16</sup>Maureen Dowd's report in the *New York Times*, 20 October 1990.



in reverse, the fact that it reacted as it did greatly solidified the new foreign policy, although not without difficulties.

People who were surprised by the degree of Soviet cooperation with the other four permanent members of the Security Council and by the strong support given the UN in the course of the Gulf crisis had simply not been paying attention. For more than three years Gorbachev had been exhorting a greater, indeed, a decisive role for the United Nations and its key agencies.

In September 1987, *Pravda* published a major article by him appealing for a whole new approach to the problem of international security and to the role of the United Nations.<sup>17</sup> His argument was that an increasingly "complex, diverse, and interdependent" world needed "a mechanism" capable of addressing transcendent problems, a mechanism adequate to underpin an alternative "comprehensive system of international security" built around drastically lower levels of nuclear and conventional arms, and a mechanism able, in place of the superpowers, to keep or make peace in troubled regions. The United Nations must be that mechanism, he contended, and, for it to be, much would have to be done to strengthen the organization.

Beginning that fall and at each subsequent General Assembly session, the Soviet Union came with a varied and detailed program for accomplishing this goal. For the most part, others, including the United States, largely disregarded or even dismissed these initiatives. In December 1988 Gorbachev delivered the most important foreign policy address of his leadership. He spoke before the General Assembly on the eve of a new U.S. Administration, conveying his notion of a world at a crossroads, a world either that would find new enhanced forms of cooperation to deal with old forms of conflict and new threats and would enthrone "the supremacy of the common human idea over the countless multiplicity of centrifugal forces" or that would prolong the history of "ubiquitous wars, and sometimes desperate battles, leading to mutual destruction."<sup>18</sup> In what he called "this specific historical situation," states, he said, needed to "rethink" their "attitude to such a unique instrument as the United Nations Organization, without which world politics is no longer imaginable." Then, as part of a sweeping reformulation of Soviet foreign policy concepts on every matter from the meaning and character of national security to the "freedom of choice" for all states (including Eastern Europe), he presented a vastly upgraded set of tasks for the United Nations. These touched all spheres of its activity, beginning with the military-political and extending to the economic, the scientific and technical, the ecological, and the humanitarian.

Thus, long before Hussein set the world on edge, and gave the United Nations a new reason for being, Gorbachev had

begun working for a stronger UN. He did this, to judge from his argument, not merely to enhance this institution, but as an integral part of an altered image of the role of the superpowers. He meant for international politics to be reformed, for many of the rights arrogated by the superpowers to be curtailed and transferred to collective institutions, for the policing of the peace to be done by the community, and for the United Nations to become a vehicle and symbol of a new international order. Thus, the sudden effectiveness of the Security Council in the Gulf crisis not only owed to Soviet cooperation, but conformed to Soviet concept.

There was another dimension of Gorbachev's foreign policy revolution equally vital to Soviet behavior in this crisis. Had the Soviet stake in much of the Third World not been thoroughly recast in the two or three preceding years, had the Soviet Union not radically shifted its approach to regional crises from Angola to Cambodia, and had it not, for that matter, reconceived the essence of its national security policy, the Soviets are not likely to have rejected their Iraqi allies so emphatically.

But, by the time Hussein moved his army, the Soviet leadership had already decided that regimes like his -- even those where the Soviet investment was exceptionally high as in Afghanistan -- held too little value to bleed or pay for them in large coin of any kind. When Gorbachev and his colleagues decided to cut their losses in Afghanistan, they were, it turned out, offering the first dramatic testimony to a profound reordering of their Third World priorities. The historic commitment to "national liberation," admittedly warped over the years by superpower aspirations and superpower rivalry, had gone by the boards. The gambles, toil, and sacrifices made in the name of this cause, like the sister burdens of competing with the Americans, the Chinese and all other comers for power and influence in these regions, had been reappraised and judged basically senseless.

From there, the stakes shifted to freeing the Soviet Union from the more onerous of these entanglements, and seeing to it that no new ones took their place. In most instances the way out was through the settlement of regional conflicts. By 1988 the Soviets featured a new theme everywhere that their progressive friends were locked in combat: Let matters be resolved by political rather than military settlements, and let governments of "national reconciliation" do the job rather than their progressive, but discredited friends. In subsequent months they not only sounded the theme, but lived by it in Angola, Cambodia, and Nicaragua. Saddam Hussein, if he counted on old Soviet affinities and priorities to prevent East and West from making common cause against him, failed to appreciate how much what counted for Soviet leaders had changed.

<sup>17</sup>"Realnost i garantii bezopasnogo mira," *Pravda*, 17 September 1987. Reportedly the article was a speech that he had intended to deliver before the General Assembly on a trip to the United States that never came off.

<sup>18</sup>The speech is reprinted in *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*, 8 September 1988.



## Life's Complexities

End product, of course, is what mattered to the United States and the rest of the outside world, but back home policy's political rear was far from calm and uncomplicated. There were not only the obvious constraints and distractions created by a deepening social, economic, political, and national crisis. There were also the direct controversies and demurs stirred by the policy itself.

The earliest and most obvious of these involved the military. Wrecking an elaborate, useful relationship with their Iraqi counterparts did not come easy. Senior figures within the military did not hide the regret they felt. Appearing in a joint press conference with a spokesman for the foreign ministry on August 22, Colonel Valentin Ogurtsov openly confessed how painful it was to see this long-standing relationship collapse. Not that they opposed the basic decision to side with the other permanent members of the Security Council, but they obviously preferred that ties with Iraq not be fully and peremptorily cut. They, along with the Middle East specialists in the foreign ministry, presumably disapproved of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze's original decision to stop all Soviet arms shipments forthwith, let alone, to announce it in a joint U.S.-Soviet statement.

As a sign of the times, however, discontent came not only from the right. Within a few weeks voices appeared attacking the leadership for not going far enough — for talking about a new morality and a new order, but then lacking the courage to run risks for it.<sup>19</sup> "We have interfered in the internal affairs of other countries so often," Galina Sidorova wrote, "that today we are trying to draw a boundary between what is our business and what is not, and we are doing it not always right." "The young U.S. Marine hugging his little daughter" before shipping out to the Gulf, she said, is not defending only U.S. interests, but "our common home." Before long deputies on the Supreme Soviet's Foreign Affairs Commission also challenged the decision to allow Soviet technicians to remain in Iraq, arguing that, if Soviet specialists were not withdrawn, the Soviet Union would soon be regarded by "world opinion as an accomplice to the aggressor."<sup>20</sup>

Nor, even when the policy was basically supported, did the support come unqualified. Early on Soviet commentators raised doubts about the Bush Administration's ultimate reasons for rushing troops into the region. Stanislaw Kondrashov, one the country's most respected journalists, wrote scarcely

ten days into the crisis that Washington had sent forces more to strengthen its influence in the area than to protect the kingdom from Iraqi attack. As he wryly put it, "Every cloud has a silver lining."<sup>21</sup> Later, Deputy Foreign Minister Belonogov seemed to echo these suspicions when he told a parliamentary committee that there were "no guarantees that the United States will leave Saudi Arabia after the crisis is over," and then added that the Soviet Union had never formally approved the dispatch of U.S. troops to the area.<sup>22</sup>

The military's stated doubts were blunter yet. General Vladimir Lobov, Chief of Staff of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, suggested that the United States might have in mind extending "its forces along the Soviet Union's southern flank, establishing a bridgehead from which to control Middle East oil flows and put pressure on Moscow."<sup>23</sup> With events leading the United States to scale back its forces in Europe, he said, "the current crisis over Iraq and Kuwait opens new possibilities" for Washington. When President Bush, at the Helsinki summit, responded to a reporter's question by saying that he had "made very clear to President Gorbachev . . . that we have no intention of keeping [U.S. forces there] a day longer than is required," Gorbachev had reason to be enthusiastic. One could see him stir visibly as he leaped upon the President's words to "do everything possible to ensure that the forces are withdrawn from the region," declaring that to be "a very important statement."<sup>24</sup>

As the crisis wore on, other angrier denunciations were heaped upon Gorbachev's policy. When Shevardnadze appeared before the Supreme Soviet in mid-October, he ran into a storm of censure from several of the hard-line deputies, most of them from the military. Led by Colonel Nikolai Petrushenko, co-chairman of the conservative group, Soyuz, they attacked the leadership for weakening the country generally, for abandoning the Iraqi alliance without consulting the parliament, and for taking "a casual approach to the possible use of military force" in the Gulf.<sup>25</sup> Evgeny Kogan, a conservative deputy from Estonia, warned that Soviet military involvement in the Gulf would provoke a backlash among millions of Soviet Muslims.<sup>26</sup> Acting under UN auspices, Petrushenko asserted, was no help. The Soviet Union's relations with Iraq would still be irreparably damaged, its standing among the Arab nations undermined, and the U.S. military position in the region strengthened.

Not to overstate the matter, extremist criticism of this sort did not represent a central challenge to policy. There is no

19See, for example, Galina Sidorova, "The World Closes In: Why Do the Soviets Opt to Stay Out?" *New Times*, no. 36 (September 4-10, 1990), pp.

4-6. Sidorova is a *New Times* political observer and special correspondent.

20Interview with Anatoly Ananyev, "We Shall Not Fight There" *New Times*, no.38 (September 18-24, 1990), p.5. Ananyev is deputy chairman of the Commission.

21 *Izvestiya*, August 14, 1990, p. 4. His colleague, Melor Sturua, had written a few days earlier from Washington that American military interventions in the Middle East have not normally brought benefit to everyone. (See *Izvestiya*, August 10, 1990, p.4)

22 Bill Keller's report in the *New York Times*, August 31, 1990,

23 *Ibid.*

24 Text of the press conference, *New York Times*, 10 September 1990.

25 See *RFE/RL Daily Report*, no. 197 (16 October 1990).

26 See Bill Keller's report in the *New York Times*, 16 October, 1990.



indication that these views were widely shared, or that they existed where real power resided, including senior levels of the military command. But they did give a raucous edge to a far wider uneasiness over the direction events might take and the dangers these might pose for the country. To that more widespread misgiving the leadership was compelled to bend. Shevardnadze sought to pacify the parliamentarians by promising that no Soviet troops would ever be sent without their advance vote of approval. For good measure, he added, and "the Security Council is in a position to pass a decision like this only if the Soviet Union votes for it."<sup>27</sup>

## The Future

What might then be expected of the Soviet Union, if it comes to a crunch in the Gulf? Ninety days into the crisis, Soviet reluctance to send Soviet soldiers could not be more evident, nor Soviet fear greater that events were gyrating toward a moment when the government would be faced with the choice. As Primakov told a Soviet television audience on his return from Baghdad, before a solution will be achieved through diplomacy, "we have a long journey ahead of us, and it might, I am very sorry to say, be interrupted by other events."<sup>28</sup>

But this nervousness, great as it was, should not obscure a more essential aspect of the Soviet position. Soviet leaders have constantly drummed on the need to stay on this side of war's threshold, but they have never ruled out Soviet participation should war come. At the Helsinki summit, when pressed on a Soviet military role in the region, Gorbachev implied that, if such were the decision of the Security Council, the Soviet Union would do its part. "We shall continue to act in cooperation within the Security Council," he said to the reporter, "in strict compliance with *all* of its decisions."<sup>29</sup>

In the end, the decisive impulse is likely to be what from the beginning has been the source of revolution in the Soviet approach: A deep desire to be a part of a community mobilized against aggression, mostly as a first fragile step toward a different international order. This larger enterprise, after all, goes to the heart of Gorbachev's foreign policy vision, and, if the Soviet Union flees its first test, the whole thing begins to crumble.

Any Soviet military role will have to be within the framework of the United Nations. Indeed, as Soviet Chief of Staff, Mikhail Moiseyev, made clear early in October, Soviet support for anybody's military role in the Gulf, including the United States, will depend on whether the Security Council approves.<sup>30</sup> Any Soviet role will also surely be very limited,

more symbol than substance. Still, many on the Soviet side understand the importance of even a limited Soviet contribution, for, "even a limited involvement in primarily defensive actions could have great military and political significance." Alexei Arbatov, whose words these are, proposes, for example, the deployment in Saudi Arabia of "several anti-aircraft defense squadrons" or "anti-aircraft artillery units to protect the Syrian contingent."<sup>31</sup>

Arbatov knows that, "given the extremely difficult economic and political situation inside the Soviet Union" and the popular opposition to military involvement anywhere these days, doing even this much will not be easy. He, for example, argues that it can only be done if Soviet servicemen are sent on a voluntary basis. But the commitment must be made, he says, "because in the final analysis, the stakes in the Gulf crisis include more than the liberation of Kuwait and the security of its neighbors. The very future of a post-Coldwar world free of the Soviet-American global confrontation is at stake." "Can our state," he concludes, "as the pioneer of the new political thinking, stand aloof at the hour of trial, when words must be verified by deeds?"

The longer-run question, of course, concerns the future. How exceptional is Soviet behavior in this crisis? And, for that matter, the behavior of everyone else? Can the Soviet Union be counted on to exercise the same restraint in the next crisis, or lend the same level of support to the collective effort? Or is Hussein's act so egregious, the oil so important, and the Soviet Union's internal distractions so great that no future event will likely rally the international community in the same way and oblige the Soviet Union to cooperate to the same degree?

This is what makes the Gorbachev foreign policy revolution so important. If Soviet ideas about the world and the Soviet place in it had not been already utterly revised, and Soviet behavior, already so different in all other vital spheres, prudence would have favored no rush to judgment. The Iraq case was unusual. But, when the pilings and struts of an entire foreign policy are so thoroughly reconstructed, and, when this reconstruction, at every turn, argues against the Brezhnev approach to Third World violence, it is reasonable to expect, in most instances, a Soviet response generically similar to the present one. The Soviet Union and the United States may not see eye to eye on all aspects of the next crisis, for that rarely happens even among allies, but so long as the current Soviet leadership guides policy it seems unlikely that the Soviet Union would return to its competitive ways.

But what if the current Soviet leadership does not survive, or what if the Soviet Union does not survive? Then what is the

<sup>27</sup>Keller, *New York Times*, 10 October 1990.

<sup>28</sup>Reuters in the *New York Times*, 1 November 1990.

<sup>29</sup>Press conference, *New York Times*, 10 September 1990, p. 9. My emphasis.

<sup>30</sup>This was part of a joint interview that General Colin Powell and he gave to the editors of the *New York Times*, during his visit to the United States. (See *The New York Times*, October 3, 1990.)

<sup>31</sup>Alexei Arbatov, "Arab Dilemma for Soviet Politics," *Moscow News*, no. 41 (21-28 October, 1990), p. 3.



meaning or value of Soviet cooperation in the Gulf crisis? Hazardous confident predictions for any part of the Soviet future, including its foreign policy, is fool's work. But there are a few signs. First, considering the apparent priorities of at least parts of the Soviet military in the Iraqi crisis, any future government beholden to the military or under its influence could not be counted on to jettison its special relationships with Third World militaries as readily as the Gorbachev leadership has in this case. But even the most conservative, authoritarian Soviet regime will not have the wherewithal to turn back the clock and engage again in Third World adventures.

On the other hand, and the more likely scenario, if Soviet policy comes under the increasing influence of the republics, particularly, the Russian Republic, those who presently lead are likely to push the Gorbachev policy even further and faster. Andrei Kozyrev is the new Russian foreign minister, and, when he was recently asked his view of Soviet involvement in

the Third World, he responded: "Aid to developing countries will be rendered only after we have attained the level of highly advanced countries. As for military aid to such countries as Cuba, Libya, and Syria, such aid reflects neither their interests nor ours."<sup>32</sup>

What this surely all means, therefore, is that, as far as the Soviet Union is concerned, for the first time in this century, if the international community will give collective security another try, Moscow will do its part to make it work. By collective security, I mean the principle underlying the League of Nations and the United Nations: All nations banded together against the rogue aggressor state. Indeed, among the great powers, the Soviet Union may be the only one willing to entrust the general welfare to this principle. The only one willing to make this a rule of policy, rather than a recourse when convenient.

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<sup>32</sup>Interview with Andrei Kozyrev, *Moscow News*, no. 43 (4-11 November 1990), p.13.







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